

Date: Monday, December 22, 1997 9:56:37 AM
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Subj: Christmas greetings!
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Dear Family and Friends,

I will not get cards out this year. At the rate of behindness I am, I will probably not get cards out next year!

We miss you all and can imagine the fun and festive spirit that lives in your hearts and homes this season. We also hope that amid all the chaos and hype you find a moment of peace and reflection that brings the hope of Christ alive in your lives.

We had a remarkable Sacrament meeting a week ago. I wish I had a recording of it. It was one of the wonderful meetings where your spirit and your funny bone is touched. I was crying tears of profound love for the Savior one minute and tears of laughter and surprise the next. We had a convert of only several years speak about her love of the Savior and the Gospel. She was my camp counselor for the girls this past summer and was wonderful. She is so pregnant that you can't believe she won't pop at the seams any moment. She spoke so movingly about her testimony and her joy in the Gospel. Her talk was followed by my dear friend, Kristen Evans, singing a song her father wrote called "Mary Wrapped her Shawl Around . . ." or something like that. I'm sorry I can't recall Kristen's maiden name, but Liz and some of the others of you out there would recognize her father's name. She's out in Utah right now, or I'd call for both the correct title, and her father's name. I'm not sure it's a published song, yet. Kristen and Mark just returned from Finland where Mark was an assistant to the Ambassador. Their next foreign service assignment is Beijing. They are here for language training and leave in February. Everyone, or at least every mother and father in the congregation was wiping their eyes.

She was followed by a speaker by the name of Gary Griffin. Gary grew up

in a small mining town near Tucson, Arizona. When Gary returned from his mission, he had only two weeks to scrape together enough money to pay his tuition at a small community college away from his home, housing costs, and food expenses. He reported that as it was a small community college, the tuition wasn't much, but he still had barely enough earned during those two weeks to pay his tuition and books, his first month's rent, with a meager allowance for the first month's food. He figured that if he didn't pay his tithing, he'd have five dollars a week that he could

spend on food for the first semester. If he did pay his tithing, he wouldn't even have enough for his room, let alone his "board."

I should explain that during the month of December, our Bishop always has somebody give a talk about tithing in conjunction with tithing settlement. In the past twenty years, I can not remember a single talk about tithing that made much of an impact upon me. Maybe if I was a non-tithe payer, I'd remember them more.

In any event, Gary went to his mother with his predicament. He explained that if he paid his tithing, he would not have enough money to live on that first month. His family was not in a financial position to help him in any way. She quietly confirmed to him her conviction that he must pay his tithing and trust in the Lord to provide the help he needed in order to eat. He paid his tithing.

Gary went away to school and tried vainly and valiantly the first week to find a job. Because it was a small community, and because there were lots of poor students needing jobs, there were no jobs left by the time he got there. At last he was able to secure a job as a grave digger in a small community cemetery. The problem was, there hadn't been a single grave dug there in the preceeding year. Still, it at least held out the hope of some money. Gary said, "You'll never believe this, but that first month, somebody died and I got to dig a grave." (He delivered this whole story slowly and with an absolute deadpan expression.) "And the next month, somebody else died, and I got to eat that month. And every month, for an entire year, somebody died, and I got paid. I didn't get paid much, but it was enough. I paid for my apartment, and I ate lots of rice, macaroni and cheese, and potatoes, but I ate." (The congregation started out with a rumble of laughter, but it grew and grew, and by the time Gary finished we were all roaring with laughter, tears coursing down our cheeks.) He

finished up by saying that he went back some years later and found out that after he left there had not been another burial in that cemetery for SEVEN years! I think I'd have moved OUT of that town as long as Gary was the gravedigger!

What a great Sacrament meeting!

Yesterday was our Christmas program. I wish I had a recording of Jill

Casillas' Christmas message. I never talk with Jill when I don't go away having laughed about something, and having heard her say something about a scripture she'd read during the week that touched her in some way. She has the most dog-eared scriptures in the congregation. Jill is married to a convert whose parents are Mexican and are not members of the Church. Her husband, Ed, is our dentist. They came back to D.C. as nearly newly-weds hoping to open a small art gallery. Ed did the gold-work for lots of the local dentists. In his 40's he decided that it would be easier to be a dentist, than an artist, and would provide a better living for his family. His family supported him in dental school running more than a few newspaper routes. They are a wonderful family with seven children. They raised them all in a little house on Highland street that has three bedrooms and ONE bathroom. I'm sure the house doesn't have more than 1100 square feet. They have enough money now to move, but haven't been able to find a buyer for a house with only ONE bathroom. Jill says these professional couples with NO kids come through and just love the house (she's an artist with decor, flowers, food, and an eye for beautiful, artistic things) but who couldn't possibly survive with only one bathroom for two people!

Jill talked about growing up in a small logging community in northern California. Her dad worked for a logging company. Every year they would search all year long for the perfect Christmas tree. There were six kids, and each had his or her opinion of just what was the perfect tree. They would take Sunday rides during the year and map out the locations of this tree and that tree for December consideration. Then when the time came to actually go and choose the tree to cut, they would pack a lunch and dinner, let their Uncle know where they'd be and when they'd return just in case they didn't get back, and pack up in the car to go cut their tree. She said one year their Uncle did have to come and rescue them, as their car wouldn't start once they returned from cutting down the tree.

Jill said that their Dad worked with trees every day. It would have been no problem for him to go out during his lunch hour, cut down a tree, and bring it home to put up. But that kind of tree didn't build the memories that bind a family together. It was the plotting, the planning, the bundling up, the picnic lunch, the final tree considerations, the trudging through waist-deep snow, and topping of the tree with Dad dragging all the kids back to the car riding in the tree's branches, that made the Christmas tree memorable.

She told of coming to Arlington and joining in with ten or twelve other families to go to a pre-school parking lot in the pre-dawn hours of two or three in the morning in order to be the first there when a truck pulled up with a small selection of just cut trees from the mountains of West Virginia. Each family would be there with their flashlights and hot cocoa, fighting over this tree and that, discussing the finer points of this one or that one and finally bundling them off on their cars. Our local, much loved painter, would hold trees for the wives whose husbands couldn't be lured out of bed at such a horrible hour or who were home with sick kids. He would later call all the women in the ward who got trees that morning and complain that they got away with the best tree and it wasn't fair. We all knew, of course that his wife Phyllis, the absolute perfectionist, had the nicest tree of all. Still, we all waited for Bob's call, which would confirm to us that we had the nicest tree, after all. Then we'd all go to each other's houses to see who managed to decorate it in the best way. Phyllis always claimed to win.

Barry and I got in only on the end of this tradition, as we began our tree tradition with our kids by going to tree growers, picking out our own tree and cutting it down ourselves. This has gradually diminished to picking out cheap trees from lots with the kids, and this year, I'm sorry to say, I went out without any kids at all and picked out our Christmas tree. It's time for a reality check!

She compared this to how we fulfill our callings and our service within the Church.

She then related the story of Christmas giving and Christmas presents in her family. Every year, on December 1st, her Mom would put the

Montgomery Ward and Sears Roebuck catalogues on the table in the living room. They could not be removed from the room under any circumstances. Jill says there were never two books more poured over, discussed, underlined, cross-referenced, discussed and used than those two catalogues. In them were the hopes, dreams, and longings of every child in her family.

Jill says that we should all have the same feelings for the scriptures that she had as a child for those two catalogues. They should be used, cross-referenced, discussed and filled with all our hopes, dreams, and longings for life with our Father in Heaven.

Jill spoke of her Christmas memories with her father as he lay dying last year. They laughed and chuckled over their memories and Jill says her Dad never regretted the money he spent on Christmas gifts for his family. It was just about the only thing he ever used a credit card for. He said as the Christmas spending bills came each month, he happily paid them, knowing how much fun and joy it brought to his kids. He told her he always finished up paying them off in November, just in time for a new round in December--but he never resented having to pay these particular bills.

Jill compared this to how the Savior willingly paid the debt for our sins.

Jill then told about Ed's Christmas memories. Ed's family went to midnight mass together and then came home for each to open their one present. Every year, except for one, each child got a pair of jeans. One year, Ed, just Ed for some reason, got a toy--a bow and arrow. Ed opened the back door, shot an arrow into a snow drift, and didn't see it again until April when the snow finally melted. She said that ever so slowly, Ed was converted, not only to the Church, but to her family's style of Christmas living and giving. So now, Ed doesn't even mind (much) paying off those Christmas credit card bills.

Jill related this to missionary work. She urged us all to give the gift of the Gospel this coming year to just ONE dear friend, and read the scripture about the joy that is to be had in just one soul coming into the Kingdom of God.

Jill also spoke of the remarkable Sacrament meeting we'd had the previous week, and how she had made a habit of specifically praying before she goes to Sacrament meeting that she be open to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as she listened to the speakers. She chastized our ward for no longer holding Christmas pageants for the young children in the congregation. The last Christmas story pageant we had for the Primary was about fifteen years ago. Her younger children and most of mine have never had the experience of playing a part in the telling and portraying of

the Christmas story in front of the congregation. She remembers vividly the year that she got to be Mary and the tender and holy feelings she had as a child for this opportunity. She grabbed me afterwards and said that we should be in charge of seeing that next year, the children in our congregation are a part of a nativity scene. I wonder if we didn't stop the pageants because the last one that I remember erupted into a pulling and tugging fight when Jana VanOrman ran over and stole the baby Jesus from the cradle and "Mary" tried to rescue him and put him back!

After her talk, the choir sang seven numbers, interspersed with poems and scripture. It was a nice program.

Our chapel was incredibly beautiful, having beautiful bouquets in each of the deep window recesses from the previous days two wedding receptions which I had a role in pulling off.

The weddings were beautiful. Margot, your beautiful cut-glass crystal platters were put to good use. My house is a mess. Time to put some order and fun into our own holiday celebrations.

May we all take time to love and interact with each other and build the kind of memories that we will want to recount as we lay upon our deathbeds!

Much love,

Ginger

Date: Tuesday, December 9, 1997 8:04:01 PM
From: HTHALLJR
Subj: A Christmas Message: Giving is all that matters

Dear family and friends,

This piece from today's Salt Lake Tribune made me think of my mother and my sisters and all their Christmas sewing efforts. (J/K [= Just Kidding] !) Enjoy!

Tracy

<http://www.sltrib.com/>

Tuesday, December 9, 1997

Ugly Brown Blouse Proves Giving Is All That Matters

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PROVO -- Like the proverbial petrified fruitcake, the ``Ugliest Brown Blouse'' has haunted Marlise Brough for decades.

Now, it's back.

The latest chapter in a long-running gift-giving feud between sisters left Brough tongue-tied and red-faced. ``Santa'' delivered the 20-year-old brown polyester blouse

Thursday night at Provo City's employee Christmas Party.

``Just wait," Brough, Provo Library's director of audio visual services, finally managed to say.

Mayor-elect Lewis Billings helped deliver the gift no one wants. In a rigged draw, Billings held an envelope of employee names for Santa to pick the winner of a framed, autographed piece of art.

Brough's name, it turned out, was on all those pieces of paper in the envelope. The ``art'' was the blouse.

``It was ugly then and it's ugly now," said her sister, Terrise Giovinazzo, 33, of Stockton, Calif.

Giovinazzo was in junior high when she made the blouse, her first effort at sewing. Her mother would not allow her to throw it away, so Giovinazzo stuffed it inside Brough's suitcase when she came for a visit.

And so it began. Last year, a magician pulled it out of a hat. Another year, it was baked in a birthday cake. Then, there was the year it returned, hidden inside a carton of ice cream.

It even dangled on Brough's Christmas tree when Giovinazzo molded it with papier-mache into an apple-shaped ornament and Brough didn't recognize it for a year.

Giovinazzo recounts she was most surprised on her honeymoon and during the birth of her first child. During her honeymoon, Giovinazzo looked forward to an elegant breakfast in their Napa Valley resort suite. But when the silver lid was lifted, it was blouse a la carte.

And in 1994, Giovinazzo's firstborn was swaddled in the well-traveled polyester.

Brough, 46, said Thursday night's reunion with the blouse was tough to beat -- even better than the time it was wrapped around the roots of a potted plant and wasn't discovered until the plant died, a year later.

``Wait until next year," Brough laughed. ``Just wait."

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